

	<p>Illinois Small Business Development Center Network</p> <p><b>WEEKLY CONNECTION</b></p> <p>Entrepreneurship ~ Innovation ~ Technology</p>	
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*"Professional Guidance for Business Growth"*

**April 20, 2015**

**In Today's Weekly Connection:**

- + **Spotlight on Success**
- + **SBDC's In The News**
- + **SBA Small Business Advocate**
- + **Maximizing Neoserra**
- + **Valued Resources**
- + **IESBGA Update**
- + **Network News and Moves**
- + **America's SBDC Network Connect**

### **Spotlight on Success – Excel Foundry & Machine Inc.**

The following article by Jim Foley appeared in the March issue of InterBusiness Issues magazine found at <http://www.peoriamagazines.com/ibi/2015/mar/manufacturing-and-international-trade>.

Manufacturing and International Trade: The Excel Way; A brief discussion with the team at Excel Foundry

I have had the pleasure of working with Excel Foundry for over 15 years as director of the [Small Business Development Center, International Trade Center at Bradley University](#).

During that time, Excel has significantly increased its international activities. It has been exciting to watch their growth, help them with the challenges and celebrate their success. Excel seemed an ideal company to discuss the specific implications for manufacturers as they expand internationally. I first sat down with CEO Doug Parsons, and then discussed international issues with Rod Bollinger, chief operating officer; Matt Wake, director of engineering; and Dan Wegner, director of quality. What follows are some key excerpts from those conversations.

How important has your international expansion been to your overall success?

Parsons: Without a doubt, it has been a critical success factor. The mining industry as a whole is global, and we had to go to the locations where our customers operate. Whether that is China, Chile, Australia or South Africa, we had to be there or lose significant sales. There have been leadership changes at the global mining companies, leading to an increased focus on cutting costs. Part of those cost-savings efforts has meant mines are not replacing equipment as readily as in the past. This has led to a greater demand for replacement parts, which is a key sector for our exports.

An important, related benefit is that our international success has helped justify our recent investments in our building expansion and capital improvements. We are generally a conservative company. Without our international sales, it would have been difficult to justify that expansion, especially during the recession. But now, I don't think we have ever been in a better position to grow and leverage that success. It means as the mining sector rebounds, we have the footprint and capacity to grow our sales.

What specific benefits has your global engagement meant on your competitive position?  
Parsons: At the end of the day, beyond manufacturing, we are also an engineering company. We have to provide solutions and quality that meet very demanding conditions. Through our international activities, we see applications of mining equipment different than in the U.S. For example, our engineers visit the oil sand fields in Canada and bring those experiences back to Pekin where we can leverage them to other applications domestically and internationally. It makes us a stronger competitor. Being engaged internationally means we are more intelligent and creative in our engineering, which drives further success.

Another is inventory management. Our international markets support a larger investment in inventory than we might otherwise justify. That inventory then becomes another success factor, because it supports our ability to deliver a replacement part immediately, rather than wait for production.

A final impact has been on quality. Shipping parts around the world means those parts must be at the level of quality demanded by the application. This has led to a strong effort to identify manufacturing issues at the source of production. Whether it's a heat treatment issue or metallurgy, we ensure we defect issues way before the customer will use a part.

What has your international expansion meant for you personally?  
Parsons: Given a choice, I want to be global. Yes, you have to figure out the complexities, such as foreign exchange issues, free trade zones and international documentation. But it is all fascinating and makes you more effective. I can't imagine a focus only on the U.S. market—that would be so narrow. If there was another planet that needed our products, we'd be selling there!

Doing business internationally has also shown me how small the world really is. Business, domestic or international, is all about relationships. Just like the days of the five-and-dime store, business is conducted people-to-people.

From an international perspective, what is the impact on your jobs and making sure your team is effective?

Wake: It is all about having the right people. It is one thing to have the engineering "book smarts;" it is another talent to be able to function in the field, solving problems. Everything we do from an engineering perspective is about relationships. Our engineers need to be able to effectively communicate with suppliers and customers and read the situation to ensure an effective outcome. No one standard applies.

Wegner: It also impacts our quality. Contrary to what some may think, our customers in emerging markets demand high quality. From Asia to Africa, we have to deliver world-class products and service. More often than not, that means traveling to our markets, meeting with customers and discussing the issues.

Bollinger: So to do that, you have to find the right people. It almost has to be in their DNA to want to make things happen, even after long flights and difficult work conditions. In

some respects, our customers expect Excel products to be a higher standard of quality than they can purchase elsewhere. That puts an additional challenge on us.

What about cultural differences? How does your team deal with those challenges?

Wegner: The key is respect. You need to show customers and suppliers in foreign markets that you respect cultural differences. You have to pretty much "go with the flow." I remember a trip with Matt to Indonesia, where Islam was practiced in one of our customer's facilities. We had to remove our boots past a clearly-marked yellow line. That led to some interesting challenges as we walked through some of the rooms. But we did it!

Wake: We are also developing key resources in each country we can rely on for business and cultural issues, working with regional reps in each country that are locally based. They can help a lot with these issues. And international travel is not for everyone. It puts tremendous pressure on both your work life and family. We have sometimes had to move a team member from one department to another if the international travel was not a good fit. But overall, the international aspect is great. It has led to some frustrating, but also comical incidents!

Wegner: I'm from central Illinois and didn't know when I was young I would be doing all this international travel. But it's been great. It has added a layer of variety that helps keep the job from getting stale!

### **SBDC's In The News**

The Illinois SBDC at Black Hawk College, along with several communities and economic development organizations have announced plans for a [free workshop for entrepreneurs](#) interested in competing in the Henry-Stark Counties Fast Pitch Contest. The workshop will be held on Tuesday, April 28<sup>th</sup> in Kewanee with the Fast Pitch Contest scheduled for September 22<sup>nd</sup>. Please [CLICK HERE](#) for the announcement and to find more information about the upcoming workshop.

### **SBA Small Business Advocate**

The Office of Advocacy has released the March-April 2015 issue of The Small Business Advocate. This edition highlights the release of Small Innovative Company Growth—Barriers, Best Practices and Big Ideas: Lessons from the 3D Printing Industry, an Advocacy report which identifies and offers solutions to the barriers hindering the growth and development of small innovative companies. Also featured is a report exploring the potential benefits of equity-based crowdfunding. In addition, the newsletter lists three other economic reports that have been recently issued. In regulatory news, Advocacy has recently submitted comment letters to EPA, IRS and DOE, and regulatory alerts have been issued on rules proposed by the FAA on drones, the Credit Union Administration, and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. Finally, Advocacy announces that regulatory roundtables are now being announced on its website. You can find the entire newsletter [here](#).

### **Maximizing Neoserra – Various Ways of Seeing Data**

Open the link below to learn how to access the data stream, activity summary, graphs or the list view in Neoserra.

<http://support.outreachsystems.com/resources/help/neoserra/faq.jsp?id=n232>

### **Valued Resources – Quick Tips to Help Avoid Theft in Your Store**

Open the link below to help thwart would be shoplifters.

<http://retailminded.com/quick-tips-to-help-avoid-theft-in-your-store/>

## **IESBGA Update**

DCEO Director Jim Schultz is scheduled to address the members of the Illinois SBDC Network on Friday, May 22nd at the Illinois Entrepreneurship and Small Business Growth Association's (IESBGA) Annual Conference. For more information on the background, experience and expertise Director Schultz brings to DCEO [PLEASE CLICK HERE](#) to view a recent article that appeared in the State Journal-Register newspaper.

## **Network News and Moves**

**America's #1 Trusted Small Business Development Network Celebrates 35 Years**  
[America's Small Business Development Centers \(SBDCs\) kicked-off their 35th Anniversary Monday, March 16th with a reception and SBDC client showcase on Capitol Hill.](#)

Representative Steve Chabot of Ohio, Chairman of the Committee on Small Business and Representative Ander Crenshaw of Florida, Chairman of the Financial Services & General Government Subcommittee of the Committee of Appropriations addressed the reception guests. The America's SBDC Network showcased 11 SBDC clients from 8 SBDC state programs (New York, Louisiana, Ohio, Connecticut, Florida, Washington, North Texas and Maryland). The SBDC clients were IntelliPaper (WA), Comfort Keepers (FL), Burley Oak Brewery (MD), Maggie Austin Cake (MD), JEM Engineering (MD), YEI Corporation (OH), General Hearing Instruments LLC (LA), Appetizer App LLC (NY), Bear Creek Smokehouse (TX), Vista Group International Inc.(CT) and Amodex Products Ink (CT).

The 63 state and regional Small Business Development Center Networks provide free one-on-one consulting to small businesses through nearly 1,000 locations. In 2014 SBDC clients reported their businesses increased sales by \$5.9 billion. According to data provided by the SBA, every federal dollar spent on the SBDC network helped small businesses access \$46.25 in new capital. The SBDC program is a public-private partnership in cooperation with the U.S. Small Business Administration.

"America's small businesses are truly the engine of economic growth, and for 35 years, America's SBDCs have been like spark plugs helping to keep that engine going," said Charles "Tee" Rowe, president of America's SBDC. "SBDCs are driving small business growth by helping to create a new business every 33 minutes and a new job every seven minutes."

Business has changed dramatically in the last 35 years, from the introduction of new technologies to the expansion of global trade. America's SBDCs has been there throughout helping small businesses and aspiring entrepreneurs achieve the American dream of owning their own business. For more information on America's SBDC or to find a SBDC near you, go to [www.AmericasSBDC.org](http://www.AmericasSBDC.org).

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About America's SBDC Program: America's SBDC (Small Business Development Center) Network is a partnership uniting private enterprise, government, higher education and local nonprofit economic development organizations. It is the Small Business Administration's largest partnership program, providing management and technical assistance to help Americans start, run and grow their own businesses. Learn more at [www.americassbdc.org](http://www.americassbdc.org).

**[FOR EVENT PHOTOS CLICK HERE](#)**

**[America's SBDC Network Connect](#)**

Please [CLICK HERE](#) to access the latest issue of [America's SBDC Network Connect Newsletter](#). In this issue you will find a link to the New America's SBDC Annual Conference page which includes information about sponsorship and exhibitor opportunities for the 2015 America's SBDC Annual Conference – Gateway to Small Business Success, to be held in San Francisco.

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The **WEEKLY CONNECTION** is distributed by the Illinois SBDC and DCEO Office of Entrepreneurship, Innovation & Technology each Monday to members of the DCEO Illinois SBDC Network to provide the service delivery partners with regular updates on small business issues, opportunities and resources. You may send any information to share with the Illinois SBDC Network to [Tom.Becker@illinois.gov](mailto:Tom.Becker@illinois.gov). Please feel free to forward this update to other interested resource providers and key stakeholders.

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